

ABRAHAM LINCOLN A WORLD FORCE

SPEECH

OF

HON. MEYER LONDON

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HON. MEYER LONDON.

Mr. LONDON. Mr. Speaker, I intend to speak on Lincoln as a world force.

This Republic is very little understood by other countries, notwithstanding the fact that the most scholarly and the most authoritative works on American political institutions have been written by foreigners, such as De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*; Goldwin Smith's *The United States*, an *Outline of Political History*; Bryce's *American Commonwealth*; Von Holst's *Constitutional History of the United States*; Ostrogorski's *Democracy and the Party System in the United States*, and similar works.

In European works on America emphasis is always laid on its great industrial development, on its factories, skyscrapers, and railroads. Statistical tables are presented, as if the greatness of America consisted in its bigness only. They fail to speak of the grandeur of America's soul, of America's inextinguishable love of liberty. They fail to speak of the great men to whom American life has given birth. They fail to see the America of the ideal, America the glorious, America the inspiring, America that has given martyrs and heroes to the world. And because the American people have always been in a fight against some wrong, and are in a fight to-day against the powers of evil outside of the country and inside of the country, men who do not know assume that the forces of evil have undisputed sway over the land.

I intend to present to you a short document which has been overlooked by many biographers of Lincoln, an address sent to Abraham Lincoln by the International Workingmen's Association. This was an association organized in England in 1863. It was the first serious effort to unite the working class of the various countries of the world. The moving spirit of the association was Karl Marx. As we read this declaration of the newly born international body we see that the American struggle for the emancipation of the slave found a response among all the liberty-loving elements of Europe. The address reads as follows. It must have been translated from some other language, because the English bears the evidence of translation. It is dated November 29, 1864:

TO ABRAHAM LINCOLN,
President of the United States of America.

SIR: We congratulate the American people upon your reelection by a large majority. If resistance to the slave power was the watchword of your first election, the triumphal war cry of your reelection is death to slavery.

From the commencement of the titanic American strife the workingmen of Europe felt instinctively that the Star-Spangled Banner carried the destiny of their class. The contest for the Territories which

opened the dire epopee, was it not to decide whether the virgin soil of immense tracts should be wedded to the labor of the immigrant or be prostituted by the tramp of the slave driver?

When an oligarchy of 300,000 slaveholders dared to inscribe for the first time in the annals of the world "Slavery" on the banner of armed revolt, when on the very spots where hardly a century ago the idea of one great democratic Republic had first sprung up, whence the first declaration of the rights of man was issued and the first impulse given to the European revolution of the eighteenth century, when on those very spots counter-revolution, with systematic thoroughness, gloried in rescinding the "ideas entertained at the time of the formation of the old Constitution" and maintained "slavery to be a beneficial institution," indeed, the only solution of the great problem of the "relation of capital to labor," and cynically proclaimed property in man "the cornerstone of the new edifice," then the working classes of Europe understood at once, even before the fanatic partisanship of the upper classes, for the Confederate gentry had given its dismal warning that the slaveholders' rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy war of property against labor, and that for the men of labor, with their hopes for the future, even their past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic. Everywhere they bore therefore patiently the hardships imposed upon them by the cotton crisis, opposed enthusiastically the proslavery intervention—importunities of their letters—and from most parts of Europe contributed their quota of blood to the good of the cause.

While the workingmen, the true political power of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own Republic, while before the negro, mastered and sold without his concurrence, they boasted it the highest prerogative of the white-skinned laborer to sell himself and choose his own master, they were unable to attain the true freedom of labor or to support their European brethren in their struggle for emancipation; but this barrier to progress has been swept off by the red sea of civil war.

The workingmen of Europe felt sure that, as the American war for independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American antislavery war will do for the working classes. They consider it an earnest sign of the epoch to come that it fell to the lot of Abraham Lincoln, the single-minded son of the working class, to lead his country through the matchless struggle for the rescue of the enchained race and the reconstruction of a social world.

Signed on behalf of the International Workingmen's Association, the Central Council:

Longmaid, Worley, Whitlock, Blackmore, Hartwell, Pidgeon, Lucraft, Weston, Dell, Nicars, Shaw, Lake, Buckley, Osborne, Howell, Carter, Wheeler, Starnsby, Morgan, Grossmith, Dick, Denoual, Jourdain, Morissot, Lerou, Bordage, Bosquet, Talandier, Dupont, L. Wolf, Aldrovandi, Lama, Solustri, Nuspert, Eccarius, Wolf, Lessner, Pfander, Lochner, Taub, Balliter, Rypcrynski, Hansen, Schanzenbeck, Smales, Cornelius, Peterson, Otto, Baginatti, Setocri; George Odgers, president of the council; P. V. Lubez, corresponding secretary for France; Karl Marx, corresponding secretary for Germany; C. P. Fontana, corresponding secretary for Italy; J. E. Holtrop, corresponding secretary for Poland; H. F. Jung, corresponding secretary for Switzerland; William Cremer, honorable general secretary, 18 Greek Street, Soho, London W.

In this message the representatives of the working class of the various European countries congratulate Lincoln upon his reelection, declare him to be the true representative of the working class, and express their confidence that with the abolition of chattel slavery there would be no hindrance to the genuine progress of labor.

They denounce the slaveholders, rejoice in the saving of the Republic, and point with pride to the fact that they had cheerfully accepted all the hardships caused by the cotton crisis, while some of the ruling interests of their own countries were suggesting intervention in favor of the slaveholders. They express the hope that with the elimination of chattel slavery the

working class would be able to attain "the true freedom of labor."

I am not a hero worshiper. The heroes that history records represent an accumulation. They represent the efforts of the thousands and tens of thousands who preceded them. Lincoln would have been impossible without a Wendell Phillips, without a William Lloyd Garrison, without a Henry Ward Beecher, without a John Brown. In estimating the past it is hard to judge how much credit for the progress of mankind belongs to the fanatic, to the man with a single idea, and how much shall be apportioned to the credit of the statesman moderator, and how much of progress is due to the reactionary who by rejecting the very law of growth and by refusing to listen to a fresh voice stimulates the forward-looking man to renewed effort. It is impossible to determine, to separate, to conceive the parts that men play in the making of the world and in shaping its destiny. And when I present to my own mind the name and the form of Lincoln it is not so much because of the individual, because of the man who showed himself to be so tender, so loving, so free from prejudice. It is Lincoln, the embodiment of the ideals of a people, that means so much to me. And what a brilliant orator he was. His speeches are free from those long, interminable periods. He never used a polysyllable where a monosyllable will do. Genuine oratory is the telling of the truth in the simplest possible words, so that there shall be no veil of phrases between the speaker and the listener; and that was the oratory of Lincoln.

The oppressive conditions under which he grew up made it impossible for him to unfold into a great literary genius. The part he played in the history of the world will never be forgotten as long as men love liberty. Every people has the heroes it deserves. By idealizing our great men we but give expression to what we would like to be.

If one wants to understand the soul of the American people, let him study the heroes of America. And it is because of this that I join in paying tribute to one whose name will be associated forever with the struggle for liberty, with the struggle for the preservation of the Republic. Just imagine the state of affairs if we had two republics and two flags. Divided by a geographical line, each side with its own patriotism, each with its own prejudices against the other, each claiming that it was the better and it was the best, each fearing the other and arming against the other.

It was the saving of the Union, the emancipation of the chattel slave, that stirred all liberty-loving minds throughout the world into new action for liberty, and that struggle will go on forever. Mankind will never reach an ideal state, but shall ever strive for it. There is no finality in human effort, except perhaps in the grave. That is the only place where there is finality, and many believe that even there new life begins. To strive is to live. To live is to strive. Let us hold dear the name of Lincoln, for he represents the ideal of a great people. [Applause.]

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